

Msgr. Quain Guides Parish in Tumultuous Times

The Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, December 7, 1941, shocked and outraged the United States. War had broken out in Europe and in Asia, but so far the U.S. had managed to stay out of the conflict. The attack on Pearl Harbor made this impossible. A country just recovering from the Great Depression now faced the prospect of all-out war.

On 9:30 a.m., December 8, U. S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt addressed a joint session of the U.S. Congress.

“Yesterday, December 7, 1941—a date which will live in infamy—the United States of America was suddenly and deliberately attacked by naval and air forces of the Empire of Japan.”

Radios across the nation were tuned to the President's speech. Schools heard it over their loudspeakers.

The President went on to request a declaration of war against Japan. Twenty-one minutes later, the U.S. Senate voted (82-0) to declare war. The U.S. House of Representatives followed with a vote of 388 to 1. The United States was now at war with the Empire of Japan.

Reaction was swift locally. Washington State Governor Arthur B. Langlie made the following statement:

“Your state government is prepared and ready to perform every defense task which has or will be assigned to it. The State of Washington is on the frontier of a great war. We do not know what the

future holds in store for us. We do not know what trials we must go through or what sacrifices we will be called upon to make. We do know what is at stake. We know that our country, our liberties and our very homes are threatened. We are individu-

ally and as a nation being called upon to make good our pledge of allegiance to flag and country” (*Seattle Star*).

Residents of Seattle were fearful. They expected their city to be an early target if the Japanese fleet pressed on to the West Coast. The city's deepwater port, location on the Pacific Coast, and important defense industries such as the Boeing Airplane Com-

pany and Todd Shipyards made it strategically important.

Amid blackouts and air raid drills, the federal government rounded up more than 8,000 local citizens of Japanese descent, most of them loyal U.S. citizens, and shipped them to inland internment camps. Their homes were taken over by those who came to work in Seattle's shipyards and factories.

Thousands of men enlisted and bought war bonds at giant rallies in “Victory Square” in front of the Olympic Hotel. Women joined the work force to assemble tanks, ships, and airplanes in local factories. The Seattle Housing Authority erected instant neighborhoods to house defense workers. The Port of Seattle built a new regional airport midway between Seattle and Tacoma. The city mobilized to meet the challenge.



Seattle Daily Times, December 8, 1941.

Parks were ringed in barbed wire and guarded by sentries. Lawns were dug up for gun emplacements and bunkers. Troops used the showers and toilets of field houses, coordinating schedules with residents.

Gun emplacements on Queen Anne

At 456 feet above sea level, Queen Anne Hill was an ideal site for a gun emplacement. A radar station and anti-aircraft gun soon were installed in Mount Pleasant Cemetery as part of Seattle's air defense. Some 24 soldiers lived there in tents until wooden huts could be built.

Batteries of three-inch guns were installed in the Highland Park Playground in West Seattle and on the 9-hole golf course in Jefferson Park on Beacon Hill. Search light batteries were erected in Woodland Park, Fort Lawton, Jefferson Park, Laurelhurst Playground, Froula Playground, and the Grand Army of the Republic Cemetery near Volunteer Park. A battery of the 304th Barrage Balloon Battalion was based at the Delridge Playground in West Seattle.

Life changed overnight, from the relative calm of the 1930s to the feverish war efforts of the 40s. Suddenly, the Charleston was out and the Jitterbug was in.

St. Anne Parish got swept up in these changes. Fortunately for the parish, Father Quain provided strong leadership throughout the 40s, guiding the parish with a firm hand and a lively Irish wit.

As the war effort ramped up, companies like Boeing needed more workers. People from all across the country moved to Seattle to join the assembly lines for B-17s and other aircraft and ships. Many of the newcomers were Catholic, and began attending Mass in the parish. The old church was filled to bursting.

To accommodate the explosive growth, Fr. Quain arranged to have Masses said simultaneously in the upper church and in the basement. While this

eased the crowding, it was distracting. The two services could never coordinate perfectly, so that the people in the lower church were frequently distracted by the people in the upper church (and vice versa) as one service moved at a different pace than the other. The sounds echoed back and forth between the floors—standing, sitting, singing, and scraping kneelers.

One Sunday, a mouse ran across the altar boys' shoes during the Consecration. The priest and the



U.S. Army 3-inch anti-aircraft gun, 1943.
Photo courtesy Sitka Historical Society.

altar boys were too busy looking at the host to notice the mouse. Before anyone could react, the mouse ran back again. Neither the priest nor the boys saw the rodent, but the parishioners did. Such distractions were simply part of life.

Despite the inconveniences, few complained. After all, they were part of what's been

called the Greatest Generation. They considered their sacrifices miniscule compared to those of the troops fighting in Europe and the Pacific.

Save your bacon grease!

Everyone pitched in for the war effort. There were scrap drives for steel, tin, paper and rubber. These were a source of supplies and gave people a means of supporting the war. Automobile production ceased in 1942, and rationing of food supplies began in 1943. Butter was in such short supply it became a black market commodity. Victory gardens supplied 40 percent of the vegetables consumed on the home front. People saved bacon grease because the glycerin could be used for explosives.

Despite the privations, life on the home front had its appeal. The daily rituals of parish life eased worries over husbands, brothers and fathers in harm's way. During the war years, the parish sponsored an annual crab supper, with crab donated by a parishioner who owned a fish company. Dessert was lemon meringue pie. The beverage of choice was tomato juice.

To raise money, the parish hosted a Safe and Sane fireworks stand. The fireworks had to be bought, transported, stored and sold with precautions against theft; someone had to spend each night guarding the stand during the sale days before the Fourth of July.

During the war, the only basketball court was at the YMCA on Queen Anne Ave. between Galer and Garfield. The St. Anne School boy's basketball team practiced there. One year, they lost all their games; it could be said that Banchemo Hall was 75 years too late.

In the 40s, Sister Louella took over as principal from Sister Ermalinda. Sister Louella improved the athletic program so that the school's teams starting winning again. Parishioners remember this as the Golden Age for the school's athletics.

Sister Louella also improved the school's curriculum, despite the crowding. There were four classrooms on each floor, one grade in each, often over 45 students in some classes. There were separate areas of the playground for the boys and girls and on rainy days, they had separate areas on the East and West sides of the school for recess.

The convent also served as a music conservatory. There were eight practice rooms on the first floor of the convent. Students paid for their music lessons and then were allowed to use the pianos in the practice rooms.

"They had good discipline and good teachers," says Ellen McNamee of the school. "My children had no problem getting into high school and college."

Ellen, joined St. Anne's in 1942 and remained a parishioner until her death a few years ago. She was born in Illinois, grew up in Spokane, and worked in Olympia for the state insurance commission before she married Larry McNamee and

moved to Seattle. "At that time when women married, they had to quit working," she said. But if she quit working at her job, she continued working as a volunteer in the parish.

When she first arrived at St. Anne's, Ellen didn't know anyone, but that didn't last for long. "I came here as a total stranger," she recalled. "I was all on my own. My husband was out on a ship. But the people in the parish were friendly and nice. I quickly got acquainted."



U.S. Army ordinance depot, Westlake Avenue North and North Valley Street, Seattle, 1943

Photo by Herman Kreipke, courtesy Dr. Donald Kreipke, M.D.

The parish and school remained a source of continuity in the life of the community. Both of her children, Mary Ellen and Maurice, attended St. Anne's School. Mary Ellen went on to graduate from Holy Names Academy and Seattle University. Maurice attended Seattle Prep and Seattle University.

Sending her children to the school enlarged her sense of community. Her kids went to school with neighborhood children. Soon they had friends from all over the Hill. "There were lots of neighborhood kids, which gave it a strong community feel," she says. "The kids knew each other. The parents knew each other, and they knew what was going on with the kids."

Many parishioners describe "The Hill" as being a great place to grow up. There was no reason for anyone to come up to the area unless they lived in the neighborhood. There were many parks and places to play. He said that the boys on the teams became good friends. Queen Anne retained the feeling of a strong neighborhood.

This sense of community made it easier to endure the privations of the war and the sorrow of hearing that loved ones or relatives had died in the conflict. It also helped cheer the soldiers on to victory.

A Local Hero

Queen Anne resident Robert E. Galer, a Marine fighter pilot during the war, was awarded the

May 1942, Galer assumed command of Marine Fighting Squadron 224 (VMF-224) and on August 30, 1942 led the squadron to Guadalcanal. Galer would be credited with 11 confirmed victories and be awarded the Medal of Honor and a rare British Distinguished Flying Cross for the same acts of heroism.

As the war continued, Boeing quietly designed and tested a new bomber, the B-29. The secret almost escaped when the second prototype crashed near Boeing Field in 1943. But the B-29 went into production and two of the aircraft would bring the war to a close by dropping atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945.

There was immense relief and euphoria when the war ended. All the sacrifices and privations had paid off. The country had suffered greatly, but had prevailed. The Nazis and the Empire of Japan had been defeated, and everyone had a hand in the victory. Celebrations broke out across Seattle and Queen Anne.

The Mystery Dessert

After the war, the real power in the parish—the mothers—got busy, organizing the St. Anne's Mothers' Club in 1947. The new school principal, Sr. Nadine Ann, sent home flyers with the children (some things never change) advertising the first meeting, held at the home of Mrs. Sam Morse. Some 50 mothers showed up and elected Mrs. Morse the first president. The club dedicated itself to the welfare and support of the school.

The Mothers' Club and other service organizations help bind the parish together. Their work and their baked goods helped rejuvenate the community. The Mystery Dessert was a case in point.

Ellen McNamee remembers making the concoction for the St. Anne's Altar Society luncheons. These events routinely drew 300 women, providing her a place to make friends and help raise money for hosts, vestments and altar linens for the church.

"I made it with canned fruit salad, brown sugar, flour and nuts," she says conspiratorially. "It tasted like it had dates in it."

She prepared enough of the Mystery Desserts for everyone at the luncheon. She'd make a certain number a day and then put them into the freezer. It was a lot of work, but it was worth it.

"I think you should give something back," she said. "I got a lot out of the parish. I have wonderful friends. They're there for you when you need them. I thoroughly

enjoy the people I met here and have for all these years."

She and others help rebuild the community of St. Anne's after the war. But prosperity did not necessarily follow peace as wartime orders for ships and planes dried up. On the international level, the USSR, a U.S. ally during the war, emerged as a competitor and enemy. The mounting anxiety of the Cold War fueled anti-communist investigations.

At the local level, the parish desperately needed a new church to house the growing number of families attending Mass. These were the challenges the parish faced as it entered the next decade of the 50s. People wanted to put the war years behind them and concentrate on returning to normal life, but plenty of challenges lay ahead.

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